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Connecting Iraq to the telecommunications world

By Kendal Smith
Gulf Region Central District



Surface compaction and rebar shaping are two of the constant activities on the ground level of the al Mamoon Telecommunications Center and Exchange in Baghdad. (USACE photo by Kendal Smith)

BAGHDAD, Iraq –“The Center will allow Iraq to connect to the world,” summed up an Iraqi engineer overseeing construction at al Mamoon Exchange and Telecommunications Center in Baghdad.

“This will become the heart of Baghdad’s telecom system and enable the government to provide the citizens of Iraq

with reliable service,” explained U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Resident Engineer Wade Ricard. To further accent the Center’s importance to Iraq, Wade said, “It is a symbolic project, capturing the architectural aesthetics of the surrounding community and emphasizing the openness of the new government buildings, as the focal point of the city.”



Al Mamoon workers complete the framework for placing concrete on the office building complex at the Telecommunications Center and Exchange in Baghdad. (USACE photo by Kendal Smith)

Currently the project is 48 percent complete and is scheduled to open at the end of this year. The new facility features an eight-story structure that will house communication switch gear and telecommunication offices. It includes a 1,300 sq. meter post office, a loading dock for delivery trucks, a 250-car covered garage, and a cafeteria capable of seating 150 people.

More than 100 Iraqi construction workers and 23 other workers are presently preparing the first floor slab rebar and sleeves for the main office building and the post office building, casting the second floor columns and finishing the car park drainage. The contractor has his own concrete plant capable of producing 90 cubic meters of concrete per hour in order to meet the demand.

The old al Mamoon tower is a landmark known throughout Iraq, but is incapable of meeting the growing communications needs in the city. Mohammad Abdula, a lifelong resident of Baghdad, said phone

service in Baghdad is available locally allowing residents to call those in their immediate neighborhood. "But unless you use a cell phone, you can't call friends and family on the other side of the Tigris River or to other cities in Iraq. This facility is the first step in restoring and improving phone service here." He looks forward to the day when Iraqis can make international calls using their home phones as well as connecting to the Internet. In addition to connectivity, there are other reasons to consider this project as a milestone in Iraq reconstruction.

USACE Officer in Charge, Navy Lt. Cmdr. Chuck Smith, International Zone Resident Office, said that al Mamoon Center is a significantly more complex project than what is typically seen in Iraq. "The Center is being built with advanced construction techniques such as concrete post-tensioning that are rarely used here," he says. "For this reason, it's been a challenge to provide the right level of quality assurance and oversight."



Construction view of the al Mamoon Telecommunications Center and Exchange office building construction in Baghdad which will connect thousands of residents for the first time. (USACE photo by Kendal Smith)

"Perhaps the most important part of the construction is that al Mamoon Center buildings are not designed to be fortified," says Smith. "The office tower is one that might be seen in any large city in the world. It expresses a confidence that conflict will end and things will improve."

Smith is part of USACE's Baghdad Area Office that is currently managing more than 120 projects valued at more than \$770 million including new water and sewer lines, electrical distribution networks, road paving, hospital renovations and schools.

Note: Kendal Smith is a public affairs officer with the Gulf Region Central district, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Iraq. For more information, contact Kendal at 540-665-2644 or email requests to Leslie.K.Smith@usace.army.mil . For more information on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Iraq, visit www.grd.usace.army.mil.